

Portsmouth Housing in Havant Borough Council

1) Purpose

1.1 This document provides an overview of Portsmouth City Council (PCC) housing provision in the Havant Borough Council (HBC) area as well as the services PCC provides to its tenants living in this area and also the services available to other housing residents. The document also outlines the contribution of PCC to the area.

2) Key Messages

- PCC is a significant social landlord in the HBC area and is also a significant employer and supports many local contractors
- PCC recognises that people living in good quality housing is an important determinant of health and wellbeing and is committed to providing this for its tenants in the HBC area. This means that PCC invests considerable sums of money in maintaining and improving the housing stock
- PCC supports its tenants both in terms of issues directly to do with their property (such as the response repair service or the energy efficiency of their properties) and also helping them in other aspects of their lives (such as supporting them with financial advice or helping them gain employment)
- The estates are part of the fabric of the area where people live and so PCC invests heavily in them in terms of cleaning or in terms of greening the area
- The PCC service model is based on designing services around needs and removing waste from the systems and as such we engage heavily to understand user needs
- PCC invests in the HBC area in terms of our commercial investments in the area
- PCC works in partnership with a number of agencies in the HBC area and recognises that effective partnership working is important to improving the quality of life for tenants and residents
- PCC is open to further discussions about what more can be done in terms of working together to improve the estates and the life outcomes of our tenants

3) Background

3.1 PCC housing service began working in the Havant area when it purchased substantial areas of land in 1944. From the late 1940s large numbers of PCC council housing was built in the Havant area which continued until the late 1970s when a change in national housing policy discouraged the building of new council homes. From the 1980s onwards a large part of PCC housing stock was sold under the "right to buy" policy and now the large estates initially built for council housing have become multi tenure, shared by owner occupiers and council tenants.

- 3.2 With a recent change in government housing policy PCC has started to purchase housing in the area, and has developed 90 brand new homes. There are also plans for even more badly needed affordable housing and PCC is looking forward to providing this in the coming years.
- 3.3 PCC currently manages 5,254 council and leasehold properties in the borough of Havant and this is primarily located in the Leigh Park, and Wecock Farm areas. The table below shows a breakdown of the location of the properties and the type of accommodation PCC owns.

	Leigh Park	Wecock Farm	Total for both offices
Blocks of flats	311	37	348
Rented bedsits/studio flats	84	0	84
Leasehold bedsits/studio flats	0	0	0
Bungalows	13	0	13
Rented flat	1,819	544	2,363
Leasehold flats	320	69	389
Houses	2,058	91	2,149
Rented maisonettes	168	58	226
Leasehold maisonettes	20	10	30
Total rented properties	4,142	693	4,835
Total leasehold properties	340	79	419
Total of all property types	4,482	772	5,254

- 3.4 PCC collects over £25 million of rental income each year in the Havant area and this is reinvested in the services that the council provides to its residents. This also funds the regular improvements the council carries out in repairing and improving properties.

4) The PCC housing service

- 4.1 The housing service is provided from two area-based housing offices (Leigh Park and Wecock Farm) which are both open during office hours from Monday to Friday. The area housing office is available for tenants to pay or to discuss in person any concerns or problems that may arise including reporting any repairs or other tenancy matters.
- 4.2 The offices are based in the heart of the community to understand and support PCC tenants in a location near their home. Additionally housing officers are based at a local area housing office, which makes them easily available to be contacted by tenants and also allowing quick easy access for visits. The PCC out of hours service manages all housing matters out of normal working hours. All PCC tenants have access to our services 24/7, 365 days a year.
- 4.3 During the COVID-19 pandemic PCC had to revisit working arrangements with housing management staff being based on site four days a week due to limited office accommodation (with the need for safe social distancing at work). This has been a very difficult time, but PCC has continued to deliver essential service to residents throughout the whole of this period. Although there has been some home based and remote working at the height of the pandemic, PCC firmly believes that being primarily office/estate based is the best method of delivering effective housing management services to our customers.

- 4.4 On average PCC let seven properties per week across the Havant borough many of which are local people up or downsizing their home due to a change in circumstances and the size of property they require. This figure can fluctuate with wider variations seen during the COVID-19 period.
- 4.5 The housing officers directly manage the whole "void" service which begins when notice is given by the outgoing tenant. Housing Officers ensure that the property is left "clean and clear" and then identify the new customer from the housing waiting list and make sure that the new property meets their needs and is habitable as soon as possible. The housing officer also liaises with contractors to agree any repairs needed prior to the new tenant moving in. Most importantly they continue working with the tenant throughout the tenancy to build trust and understanding in the working relationship.
- 4.6 This method of working has enabled PCC to better understand its customers' circumstances and to build a long term positive working relationship in managing a tenancy.
- 5) Support for our tenants**
- 5.1 PCC is very proud of the services it provides to its housing residents, which have been continually developed during the last 15 years using the "systems thinking" method of working. This places a focus on understanding the demand each service receives and driving out unnecessary waste which does not benefit the customer. Services are designed from a customer perspective and are then reviewed and improved on a regular basis.
- 5.2 PCC has a designated housing officer working a "patch" of properties who help support and maintain each tenancy. They focus on providing help and advice where and when it is needed. This working relationship is built from the moment a tenant is allocated their new home and includes the whole life of the tenancy. The housing officer's work is very diverse and includes:
- Advice to tenants about paying rent and accessing welfare benefits to maximise income
 - Providing help with neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour complaints
 - Working with other agencies including the police and social services
 - Processing mutual exchange applications (swapping properties)
 - Managing tenancies and providing help and advice when tenants circumstances change
 - Allocating homes to new tenants and managing the void process when re-letting a home
- 5.3 Working with tenants in times of crisis is an important part of our role as a social landlord. Attending joint meetings with social services for serious matters including child protection meetings is key to managing many complex tenancy issues. PCC take our wider responsibilities seriously and work with partner agencies to make tenants feel safer in their homes and the wider community. In addition to this PCC always work with our tenants to tackle problems and see enforcement action as the last resort in resolving tenancy disputes.

- 5.4 A large demand received is from tenants complaining about their neighbours causing antisocial behaviour although as the data in appendix 2 of the supporting information pack shows this rarely results in a formal complaint. PCC housing officers support our tenants and tackle those tenants causing nuisance including escalating the most serious cases for support from our specialist anti-social behaviour teams and the police.
- 5.5 With lower levels of antisocial behaviour, we employ Portsmouth Mediation Service to independently work with residents to mediate to find common ground to resolve disputes, and practice restorative methods of mediation.
- 5.6 PCC believe that rent collection is more than just asking people to pay. It also includes assisting and enabling tenants when their circumstances change and there are difficulties paying rent and other bills. PCC employs two specialist money advisors in the Havant area to help tenants maximise income and they are also able to assist with managing debts owed to a wide number of creditors. In addition to this PCC has 20 housing officers in the Havant area with experience of maximising benefits.
- 5.7 PCC is constantly reviewing its process to effectively manage rental income and to contact tenants as early as possible who may need help. In the last 12 months PCC has invested in an additional IT system (known as "rentsense") to identify accounts owing rent weekly rather than fortnightly, which allows housing officers to identify potential problems much earlier.
- 5.8 PCC also provides a sheltered housing service within the HBC area (more detail in appendix 1 of the supporting document). The purpose of the service is to provide accommodation and support where needed. The service provides housing related support to enable residents to live as independently as possible in their own home. In total, PCC provides 208 sheltered housing properties across six schemes in the HBC area.
- 5.9 To receive the sheltered housing service the applicant for housing must:
- Be over 55 years of age
 - Have a defined housing need
 - Have a defined support and/or health needs
- (applicants 55 years of age and under will also be considered if they have support needs.)
- 5.10 The PCC resident engagement team (see appendix 4 of supporting information pack) provide support to tenants and leaseholders in the HBC area. The team is able to support people into employment through specific courses to gain qualifications in e. forklift or SIA but also helping with CVs and interview skills etc. The team also support resident consultation and tenant participation to make sure that PCC services are meeting the needs to the tenants and that new developments are responding to these needs too.

6) Improving the stock and the area

- 6.1 As previously stated, PCC recognises that good quality housing is a key determinant of wellbeing for tenants. Full details of our building maintenance in the HBC area is provided in appendix 6 of the supporting information pack. This details the dwelling profile within HBC showing that just under half the properties are flats and that most properties were built from the 1950s to the 1970s (particularly in the 1950s).
- 6.2 The repairs service is demand led undertaking reactive response repairs together with disabled adaptations, kitchen and bathroom replacement, installing over-bath showers and replacing gas boilers. Currently the PCC teams receive 430 repair demands per week. As stated previously PCC also invests to bring voids up to the standards required for new tenants. This can include kitchen and bathroom replacement and new heating systems as well as the statutory checks. In the first six months of the 2021/22 financial year PCC spent £1m on void expenditure and a further £400k undertaking works on new properties purchased in the HBC area. Appendix 6 also provides details of the extensive planned maintenance programme within the HBC area and schemes that have recently been completed for example the £1.5m scheme to improve fire door and internal escape routes on the Soberton Road site which is commencing in April 2022, or the recently completed £1.4m external decoration scheme at Magpie Walk.
- 6.3 PCC has also invested heavily in improving energy efficiency. Eighty-three solar PV systems have been installed on landlord supplies totalling 750kWp of generating capacity. Further energy efficiency improvements are ongoing at the sheltered housing blocks including insulation and building management systems (BMS) and loft and cavity wall insulation are universal across the social housing stock.
- 6.4 The PCC properties in the HBC area are part of estates which also need looking after. Appendix 7 of the supporting information pack provides details of the estate services that PCC provides in the HBC area. The purpose of all these services is 'to keep the local area, safe, clean and tidy and provide advice and support when needed'. Estate services is made up of three main areas within the HBC area:
- Green and clean - responsible for all communal cleaning and grounds maintenance within PCC's housing stock / land.
 - Estate service officers - responsible for estate-based functions such as fire alarm checks, block checks, investigations of ASB or fly-tipping etc within PCC's Housing stock/land.
 - Housing depot functions - responsible for bulky collections, high reach window cleaning, jet washing, green waste collection etc within PCC's Housing stock / land.
- The Leigh Park green and clean and estate service officers cover Leigh Park, Wecock Farm and the Crookhorn areas.
- 6.5 The green and clean teams produce a sustainable planting plan annually which includes trees, shrubs and wild meadow. Over the last few years in Leigh Park many planting schemes have taken place including the planting of 12 trees, 4,000 shrubs and plants, 120,000 bulbs and a large area of wild meadow.

7) Joint working

- 7.1 PCC works collaboratively with many partners in the Havant area. This includes HBC (environmental health, waste collection, planning, housing teams) and Hampshire County Council (mainly social service type roles). We work with other stakeholders including Portsmouth Water (Havant Thicket), Hampshire Police and other support agencies.
- 7.2 During the COVID-19 period PCC has worked with Havant Borough Council to jointly fund a garage for a local food and clothing bank. This was an excellent example of local teams working in the community supporting a local group rather than a top-down initiative.
- 7.3 The area housing office and senior housing managers have a really positive working relationship with HBC staff and one example of this working relationship relates to the letting of new properties, from PCC new build developments, to local Havant residents. Although there were differences in the mechanism we both use to let properties, our teams overcame any barriers and were then able to provide a seamless service to new tenants from the Havant waiting list.
- 7.4 The area housing office physically collects payments for rent and council tax either at a main cash office or by phone. PCC currently collects on average £2,000 per week in council tax payments for Havant Borough Council (and make no charges for doing so) to enable our tenants to meet their council tax responsibilities as well as their rent payments. In addition to this our money advisors have a long-term relationship of working with Havant Borough Council tax and benefit teams to assist customers.
- 7.5 PCC is really looking forward to working together on the new larger proposed developments (Strouden Court and Cabbagefield Row) which will benefit both our Portsmouth and Havant Residents who desperately need social housing. The new tenants will move into brand new accommodation built to meet modern day requirements and have lower running costs. More detail on the Cabbagefield Row development is shown in appendix 3 of the supporting information document.
- 7.6 PCC is aware that HBC has ambitions for further improving the quality of life of residents from our large estates and PCC is looking forward to working in partnership to help achieve this mutual aim.

8) Support & investment in the wider Havant community

- 8.1 PCC is a large employer in the HBC area employing directly over one hundred employees (housing officers and estate-based teams including, directly employed gardeners and sheltered scheme staff). Additionally, 100s of contractors are employed in the area maintaining our homes while other contractors are employed in improving our homes and building new homes. It is felt that this this employment has a significant positive impact on employment in the area.
- 8.2 There are over 1,000 garages and charged for parking spaces across the HBC area. These are mainly let to local people so that they can secure parking near their home and prices are much lower for local tenants. PCC are currently reviewing our 'under used' garage and parking sites that may have potential development opportunities for further social housing.

- 8.3 PCC also own and manage a number of commercial properties located within the HBC area, most notably, but not limited to:
- Barncroft Way Retail Parade (pictured below)
 - Botely Drive Retail Units
 - Middle Park Way Retail Units
 - St Albans Road Retail Units
 - Strouden Court Retail Units
- 8.4 The portfolio also includes properties such as the Phoenix Community Centre, St Clares Pre-School the LP Service Station. Dunsbury Park is significant investment in the area, providing many jobs, outside the housing portfolio.
- 8.5 HBC residents of all tenures are able to access energy saving support through PCC led schemes. More details are given in appendix 5 of the supporting information pack but it includes:
- Free home energy visits via partners at LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership) can be offered to low income or vulnerable households, where an impartial energy advisor can check fuel bills, install free small energy saving measures and make referrals for additional support such as for free white good replacements. LEAP visits are a conduit to larger measures such as free new broken boilers (or repairs where economically viable) for vulnerable households and free white goods.
 - HBC residents currently heating their home with electricity or gas fires can receive free gas central heating and gas connections (as required), worth as much as £6,000. Switching from electric heating to gas central heating can save households as much as £700 a year on bills, making it an essential intervention to reduce fuel poverty.
 - Residents can also access funding to receive free larger energy interventions through the Warmer Homes scheme. Worth up to £10,000 per household, the grant offers free solid wall insulation, air source heat pumps and solar PV.

9. **Challenges**

- Open space maintained by PCC housing services but with few PCC tenants living close to the open space
- Age of housing stock - thinking about decarbonisation
- Financial pressures HRA

10. **Opportunities**

- Shared service opportunities - for example, cleaning and grounds maintenance building services
- Leigh Park and Wecock Farm area housing offices - shared workspace arrangements (mini-public service plazas)
- Reimagining our landlord offer - improving our digital access to services